

How To: Offer a Sabbatical Opportunity

Resource Type: Articles

Topic: HR Risk and Employment Practices

The concept of work sabbaticals has existed for a long time. It's gaining popularity in nonprofits as organizations work to stem turnover and address work-life balance. A sabbatical gives an employee a designated period of time to disconnect from work and rest, recharge, and focus on other aspects of their lives. If your nonprofit wants to offer sabbaticals, here are some things to consider.

Lay the Foundation

Set standards for eligibility. Historically, executive directors have most often been eligible to take sabbaticals at nonprofits, but many experts urge organizations to extend eligibility to all long-tenured employees eligible. You'll need to decide how long someone has to work for your nonprofit to be eligible, and any other criteria you wish to establish (such as good performance reviews.) You'll also need to determine the duration of sabbaticals. For small nonprofits, a sabbatical length of 3 weeks or one month will allow employees to recharge without overstressing the organization.

Determine employment parameters for sabbaticals. Decide whether you will offer full or partial salary to employees on sabbatical leave, and whether and how you will continue their benefits. Make sure that you don't commit to an overly-generous sabbatical policy that will put stress on your nonprofit's financial bottom line.

Create a policy and process. Put the criteria to qualify for a sabbatical in writing, to avoid any perceptions of unequal treatment. Remember that if your nonprofit is small, a simple policy is best. For example, you may want to require that employees provide 6 months' notice of their intent to take a sabbatical.

Get Ready

When an employee has been approved for a sabbatical, take these steps.

Decide who will cover the duties of the person who's on sabbatical. In a small nonprofit, it may make most sense to divide the employee's duties into two buckets: the first are duties that can be temporarily suspended while the employee is on sabbatical, and the second are duties that will be performed by a designated back up.

Create a one-pager covering key issues related to the employee's absence. Make sure to include where to find crucial information like system logins, and make sure the employee's email, voicemail, and other communication systems have outgoing messages saying they're on sabbatical, with information about who to contact in their absence.

Provide training to cover new duties. Anyone covering for an employee on sabbatical should be given ample time to learn the tasks for which they will be responsible.

Debrief and Learn

Encourage them to ease back in. It can work well for an employee returning from sabbatical to come back midweek as a transitional period before jumping back into meetings.

Debrief with your whole team. What did they learn during their team member's absence? How was the sabbatical rewarding and enjoyable for the employee? What did they love about their time away? Miss? This is a great opportunity to share insights the organization could use for the future.

Resources

- [Do-It-Yourself Sabbatical Guide for Nonprofits – Durfee Foundation](#)
- [Sabbatical: A Viable Tool for the Nonprofit Sector? – Center for Nonprofit Advancement](#)